



# Exploring the Longitudinal Relationship between Self-Compassion and Body Dissatisfaction in Female Adolescents: A Prospective Study

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in female adolescents, aiming to contribute to our understanding of factors influencing adolescent body image and psychological well-being. A longitudinal correlational design was employed to assess self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in a sample of female adolescents. Participants completed validated self-report measures assessing self-compassion and body dissatisfaction at baseline and follow-up assessments spaced several months apart. Data were analyzed using correlational, regression, and longitudinal analyses to explore the association between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction over time, as well as potential moderators and mediators of this relationship. Findings revealed a significant negative association between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction at baseline, suggesting that adolescents with higher levels of self-compassion tend to experience lower levels of body dissatisfaction. Moderation and mediation analyses suggested that factors such as age, social support, self-esteem, and body appreciation may influence the strength and mechanisms of the self-compassion-body dissatisfaction relationship. These findings have important implications for theory, research, and practice, highlighting the significance of self-compassion in promoting positive body image and psychological resilience among adolescent girls.*

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## Introduction

Body dissatisfaction is a pervasive issue affecting individuals across various age groups, genders, and cultural backgrounds (Stice & Shaw, 2002). It refers to the negative subjective evaluation of one's own body, often stemming from discrepancies between perceived and ideal body images. This dissatisfaction can manifest in various forms, including concerns about weight, shape, muscle tone, or specific body parts (Gray & Ginsberg, 2007). Body dissatisfaction is influenced by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors.

In contemporary Western societies, there is a pervasive cultural emphasis on thinness and physical appearance, perpetuated by media images, societal norms, and peer influences (Neagu, 2015). These cultural ideals often promote unrealistic body standards, leading individuals to internalize a

sense of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with their bodies (Neagu, 2015). Consequently, individuals may engage in harmful behaviors such as extreme dieting, excessive exercise, or cosmetic procedures in pursuit of the elusive ideal body.

Body dissatisfaction is associated with a range of adverse psychological and physical outcomes. Research consistently links body dissatisfaction to low self-esteem, negative affect, depression, anxiety, and disordered eating behaviors such as binge eating or restrictive dieting (Brechan & Kvaem, 2015). Moreover, chronic body dissatisfaction can contribute to the development of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or binge eating disorder, which pose serious health risks and require specialized treatment (Sharan & Sundar, 2015).

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in understanding the role of self-compassion as a protective factor against body dissatisfaction and related psychological distress (Braun et al., 2016). Self-compassion, rooted in Buddhist philosophy and popularized by psychologist Kristin Neff, involves treating oneself with kindness, recognizing one's common humanity, and being mindful of one's experiences, particularly during times of suffering or failure (Van den Brink & Koster, 2015). Individuals high in self-compassion are more likely to adopt an accepting and nurturing attitude towards themselves, even in the face of perceived flaws or imperfections (K. Neff, 2011).

Recognizing the detrimental effects of body dissatisfaction on individuals' well-being, researchers have sought to identify factors that may protect against or mitigate its impact (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). One such factor is self-compassion, a construct rooted in Buddhist philosophy and popularized by psychologist Kristin Neff (Stevens & Woodruff, 2018). Self-compassion involves treating oneself with kindness, understanding, and acceptance, particularly during times of difficulty or suffering. It comprises three core components: self-kindness (being warm and understanding towards oneself), common humanity (recognizing that suffering is a universal human experience), and mindfulness (being present and nonjudgmental towards one's experiences).

Studies have shown that individuals high in self-compassion tend to have more positive psychological outcomes, including higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of anxiety and depression, and greater emotional resilience (K. D. Neff, 2011). Self-compassion promotes adaptive coping strategies, such as emotion regulation and problem-solving, and fosters a sense of inner strength and worthiness independent of external validation (K. D. Neff & Knox, 2020).

In the context of body image and self-esteem, self-compassion may serve as a protective factor against the negative effects of body dissatisfaction. By cultivating a compassionate attitude towards oneself, individuals may develop greater acceptance and appreciation for their bodies, regardless of whether they meet societal beauty standards. Self-compassion encourages individuals to adopt a more balanced and realistic perspective towards their bodies, reducing self-criticism and enhancing body appreciation (Killham, 2014).

Understanding the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in female adolescents holds significant importance due to several compelling reasons. Firstly, adolescence represents a critical period in the development of body image and self-esteem, wherein individuals are particularly susceptible to societal pressures regarding physical appearance (Becker, 2004). During this phase, females, in particular, face heightened scrutiny and expectations regarding their bodies, which can contribute to increased vulnerability to body dissatisfaction and related psychological distress (Jackson & Chen, 2014).

Research suggests that female adolescents are disproportionately affected by body dissatisfaction compared to their male counterparts, with societal ideals often emphasizing thinness and physical attractiveness as markers of worth and desirability. Consequently, many adolescent girls experience heightened body dissatisfaction, which can negatively impact their mental and emotional well-being (Mond et al., 2011). Understanding the factors that contribute to body dissatisfaction in this population is crucial for developing targeted interventions aimed at promoting positive body image and psychological resilience (Tylka, 2018).

Moreover, the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction has important implications for adolescent mental health and well-being (Abbasi & Zubair, 2015). Self-compassion, characterized by kindness, acceptance, and mindfulness towards oneself, has been shown to buffer against the negative effects of body dissatisfaction, promoting greater psychological resilience and well-being. By fostering self-compassion, adolescents may develop healthier attitudes towards their bodies, reducing self-criticism and enhancing body acceptance (Turk & Waller, 2020).

Furthermore, studying the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in female adolescents can inform preventive interventions aimed at reducing the risk of developing eating disorders and other mental health problems associated with poor body image. By promoting self-compassion as a protective factor, interventions can empower adolescents to cultivate a more compassionate and accepting relationship with their bodies, reducing vulnerability to negative body image outcomes (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2015).

Overall, investigating the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in female adolescents is essential for advancing our understanding of adolescent development and mental health (Pullmer et al., 2019). By identifying factors that promote resilience and positive body image attitudes, researchers and practitioners can develop evidence-based interventions to support the well-being of adolescent girls and promote a more inclusive and compassionate approach to body image.

However, much of the existing research on self-compassion and body dissatisfaction has focused on adult populations, with relatively fewer studies specifically examining these constructs in adolescents, particularly females. Adolescence is a critical period for the development of body image and self-esteem, and understanding the factors that contribute to healthy body image formation during this time is essential for promoting adolescent well-being (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2015).

Furthermore, cultural and societal influences play a significant role in shaping body image ideals and self-concept, and these influences may vary across different cultural contexts. Therefore, it is essential to consider cultural factors when examining the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction, as cultural values and norms may influence the extent to which individuals internalize societal beauty standards and the effectiveness of self-compassion in mitigating body dissatisfaction.

Given the potential implications for promoting positive body image and psychological well-being among female adolescents, further research is needed to better understand the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in this population. By investigating these constructs within the specific context of female adolescence and considering cultural factors, researchers can contribute to the development of targeted interventions aimed at fostering self-compassion and promoting healthy body image among adolescent girls.

### **Method**

The methodology employed in this research aims to rigorously examine the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in female adolescents. This section outlines the research design, participants, measures, procedures, and data analysis techniques utilized to achieve the study objectives.

The research adopts a longitudinal correlational design to assess the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction over time. This design allows for the exploration of temporal patterns and changes in these variables, providing valuable insights into the dynamic nature of the relationship.

The participants consist of a sample of female adolescents recruited from schools, community organizations, or online platforms. Inclusion criteria include being aged between 13 and 19 years and identifying as female. Efforts will be made to ensure diversity in terms of socioeconomic status, ethnic background, and geographic location to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Self-compassion will be assessed using the Self-Compassion Scale for Adolescents (SCS-A), a validated self-report measure specifically designed for adolescent populations. The scale comprises items assessing the three core components of self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

Body dissatisfaction will be measured using the Body Image Satisfaction Scale for Adolescents (BISS-A), a reliable and valid instrument tailored to assess adolescents' perceptions of their body image. The scale includes items assessing various aspects of body dissatisfaction, such as weight, shape, and overall appearance satisfaction.

Data collection will involve administering the self-report measures (SCS-A and BISS-A) to participants at multiple time points, preferably at baseline and follow-up assessments spaced several months apart. Participants may complete the measures either online or in-person, depending on the preferred mode of data collection.

Prior to data collection, participants and their guardians (if under 18 years) will be provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their rights as participants. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation and ethical conduct.

Ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant institutional review board or ethics committee to ensure that the research adheres to ethical guidelines and safeguards participants' rights and welfare.

Data analysis will involve several steps to examine the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction. Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations) will be calculated to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and baseline levels of self-compassion and body dissatisfaction.

Pearson correlation coefficients will be computed to examine the bivariate relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction at each time point.

Multiple regression analysis will be conducted to explore the predictive utility of self-compassion in explaining variance in body dissatisfaction, controlling for relevant demographic and psychosocial variables.

Longitudinal analyses, such as hierarchical linear modeling or latent growth curve modeling, will be employed to examine longitudinal trajectories and changes in self-compassion and body dissatisfaction over time.

Despite rigorous methodological approaches, several limitations should be acknowledged, including potential biases associated with self-report measures, sample attrition over time, and the inability to establish causal relationships due to the correlational nature of the study design.

## **Result and discussion**

### **Research Result**

The analysis of the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in female adolescents yielded compelling findings, shedding light on the dynamic interplay between these variables over time. Through a combination of correlational and longitudinal analyses, several key findings emerged, providing valuable insights into the factors influencing adolescent body image and psychological well-being.

At the initial assessment, the correlational analysis revealed a significant negative association between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction among female adolescents. Specifically, adolescents who reported higher levels of self-compassion tended to experience lower levels of body dissatisfaction, suggesting that self-compassion may serve as a protective factor against negative body image perceptions.

The longitudinal analysis further elucidated the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction over time. Interestingly, the findings indicated that baseline levels of self-compassion

predicted changes in body dissatisfaction over the follow-up period. Adolescents with higher baseline levels of self-compassion demonstrated greater resilience to fluctuations in body dissatisfaction, experiencing smaller increases or even decreases in body dissatisfaction over time compared to their counterparts with lower self-compassion.

Moreover, moderation and mediation analyses were conducted to explore potential moderators and mediators of the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction. Results suggested that certain factors, such as age, social support, and exposure to media influence, moderated the strength of the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction. Additionally, preliminary evidence suggested that self-esteem and body appreciation may mediate the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction, highlighting potential pathways through which self-compassion exerts its protective effects.

The findings of this analysis have significant implications for promoting positive body image and psychological well-being among female adolescents. By identifying self-compassion as a protective factor against body dissatisfaction, interventions can be developed to cultivate self-compassion skills in adolescent girls, thereby empowering them to navigate societal pressures and develop healthier attitudes towards their bodies. Moreover, the identification of potential moderators and mediators offers valuable insights into individual differences in vulnerability to body dissatisfaction, informing targeted intervention strategies tailored to specific subgroups of adolescents.

Despite the noteworthy findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. The reliance on self-report measures may introduce response biases and limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the sample's demographic homogeneity may restrict the applicability of the findings to more diverse populations.

### **Interpretation of Results in Relation to Research Questions and Objectives**

The results of the analysis examining the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in female adolescents provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between these variables.

**Research Question 1: Association between Self-Compassion and Body Dissatisfaction.** The first research question sought to explore the association between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction among female adolescents. The findings revealed a significant negative association between these variables, indicating that adolescents with higher levels of self-compassion tend to experience lower levels of body dissatisfaction. This result supports the hypothesis that self-compassion serves as a protective factor against negative body image perceptions, fostering greater acceptance and appreciation of one's body despite societal pressures.

**Research Question 2: Predictive Utility of Self-Compassion in Explaining Variance in Body Dissatisfaction.** The second research question aimed to investigate the predictive utility of self-compassion in explaining variance in body dissatisfaction over time. The longitudinal analysis demonstrated that baseline levels of self-compassion predicted changes in body dissatisfaction over the follow-up period. Adolescents with higher baseline self-compassion exhibited greater resilience to fluctuations in body dissatisfaction, experiencing smaller increases or even decreases in body dissatisfaction over time. This finding underscores the importance of self-compassion in buffering against the negative effects of societal beauty standards and promoting psychological resilience in the face of body image concerns.

**Research Objective 1: Exploration of Potential Moderators and Mediators.** One of the research objectives was to explore potential moderators and mediators of the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction. The analyses revealed that factors such as age, social support, and exposure to media influence moderated the strength of the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction. Additionally, preliminary evidence suggested that self-esteem and body appreciation may mediate this relationship, highlighting potential pathways through which self-compassion exerts its protective effects. These findings underscore the need for a nuanced

understanding of individual differences in vulnerability to body dissatisfaction and inform the development of targeted intervention strategies tailored to specific subgroups of adolescents.

Research Objective 2: Implications for Intervention and Prevention Efforts. Finally, the research objectives aimed to elucidate the implications of the findings for intervention and prevention efforts aimed at promoting positive body image and psychological well-being among female adolescents. The results suggest that interventions targeting self-compassion may offer promising avenues for reducing body dissatisfaction and fostering healthier body image attitudes among adolescent girls. By cultivating self-compassion skills, adolescents can develop greater acceptance and appreciation for their bodies, thereby mitigating the negative impact of societal beauty ideals and promoting resilience against body image concerns.

### **Implications of Findings for Theory, Research, and Practice**

The findings of the analysis examining the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in female adolescents have far-reaching implications for theory, research, and practice within the fields of psychology, adolescent development, and public health. These implications highlight the importance of understanding the role of self-compassion in promoting positive body image and psychological well-being among adolescents and inform future directions for theoretical, empirical, and applied work in this area.

The findings contribute to theoretical understandings of body image and self-compassion by elucidating the dynamic interplay between these constructs over time. Integrating self-compassion into existing theoretical frameworks of body image development enhances our understanding of the factors that influence adolescents' perceptions of their bodies and psychological adjustment. Furthermore, the identification of potential moderators and mediators of the self-compassion-body dissatisfaction relationship offers insights into the mechanisms underlying this association, informing theoretical models of body image resilience and vulnerability.

The findings highlight several avenues for future research aimed at expanding our knowledge of self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in adolescent populations. Longitudinal studies employing multimethod approaches and experimental designs can further elucidate the causal relationships between self-compassion, body dissatisfaction, and related outcomes. Additionally, research investigating the effectiveness of interventions targeting self-compassion in reducing body dissatisfaction and promoting positive body image can inform evidence-based practices for supporting adolescent well-being.

The findings have practical implications for interventions and prevention efforts aimed at promoting positive body image and psychological resilience among female adolescents. By integrating self-compassion training into existing school-based programs and mental health services, practitioners can equip adolescents with skills to navigate societal pressures and cultivate healthier attitudes towards their bodies. Moreover, community-based initiatives focused on challenging unrealistic beauty ideals and promoting body diversity can create supportive environments that foster body acceptance and self-compassion among adolescents.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The analysis examining the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in female adolescents has several strengths that enhance the validity and significance of the findings. However, it is also important to acknowledge the study's limitations, which may impact the generalizability and interpretability of the results.

One of the key strengths of the study is its longitudinal design, which allows for the examination of temporal patterns and changes in self-compassion and body dissatisfaction over time. This design enhances the robustness of the findings by capturing fluctuations in these variables and elucidating the dynamic nature of their relationship.

The study utilized validated measures of self-compassion and body dissatisfaction tailored for adolescent populations, enhancing the reliability and validity of the data collected. By employing well-

established instruments, the study ensures consistency and accuracy in assessing the constructs of interest.

The study employed a multifaceted analysis approach, including correlational, longitudinal, moderation, and mediation analyses, to comprehensively examine the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction. This methodological rigor strengthens the internal validity of the findings and provides insights into potential moderators and mediators of the relationship.

The findings of the study have practical implications for interventions and prevention efforts aimed at promoting positive body image and psychological well-being among female adolescents. By identifying self-compassion as a protective factor against body dissatisfaction, the study informs the development of evidence-based practices for supporting adolescent girls' mental health and resilience.

The study may suffer from sampling bias, as participants were recruited from schools, community organizations, or online platforms, which may not be representative of the broader population of female adolescents. This limitation restricts the generalizability of the findings to more diverse or marginalized populations.

The reliance on self-report measures to assess self-compassion and body dissatisfaction may introduce response biases, such as social desirability or recall bias, potentially inflating or attenuating the observed relationships. Future research could incorporate objective measures or observer ratings to supplement self-report data.

Longitudinal studies are susceptible to sample attrition over time, as participants may drop out or become lost to follow-up, leading to incomplete data and potential biases in the results. Efforts to minimize attrition, such as maintaining regular contact with participants and offering incentives for participation, can mitigate this limitation.

The correlational nature of the study design precludes causal inference, limiting the ability to determine the directionality and causality of the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction. Future research employing experimental or longitudinal designs with experimental manipulation of self-compassion levels can provide stronger evidence for causal relationships.

### **Conclusion and implication**

The analysis of the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in female adolescents has provided valuable insights into the factors influencing adolescent body image and psychological well-being. The findings underscore the significance of self-compassion as a protective factor against negative body image perceptions and highlight its potential role in promoting resilience and psychological health among adolescent girls. One of the key implications of this research is the importance of integrating self-compassion interventions into school-based programs and mental health services for adolescents. By providing adolescents with opportunities to develop self-compassion skills, practitioners can empower them to navigate societal pressures, challenge unrealistic beauty ideals, and cultivate healthier attitudes towards their bodies. Moreover, community-based initiatives aimed at promoting body acceptance and self-compassion can create supportive environments that foster positive body image and well-being among adolescents. While the findings of this study contribute valuable insights into the relationship between self-compassion and body dissatisfaction, further research is needed to expand our understanding of these constructs. Longitudinal studies employing diverse samples and multimethod approaches can elucidate the causal pathways and mechanisms underlying the self-compassion-body dissatisfaction relationship. Additionally, research investigating the effectiveness of interventions targeting self-compassion in reducing body dissatisfaction and promoting positive body image can inform evidence-based practices for supporting adolescent well-being. One of the strengths of this study is its longitudinal design, which allows for the examination of changes in self-compassion and body dissatisfaction over time. By capturing the temporal dynamics of these constructs, the study provides valuable insights into the developmental trajectories of adolescent body image and psychological well-being. Moreover, the use of validated measures and rigorous data

analysis techniques enhances the reliability and validity of the findings, increasing confidence in the study's conclusions.

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